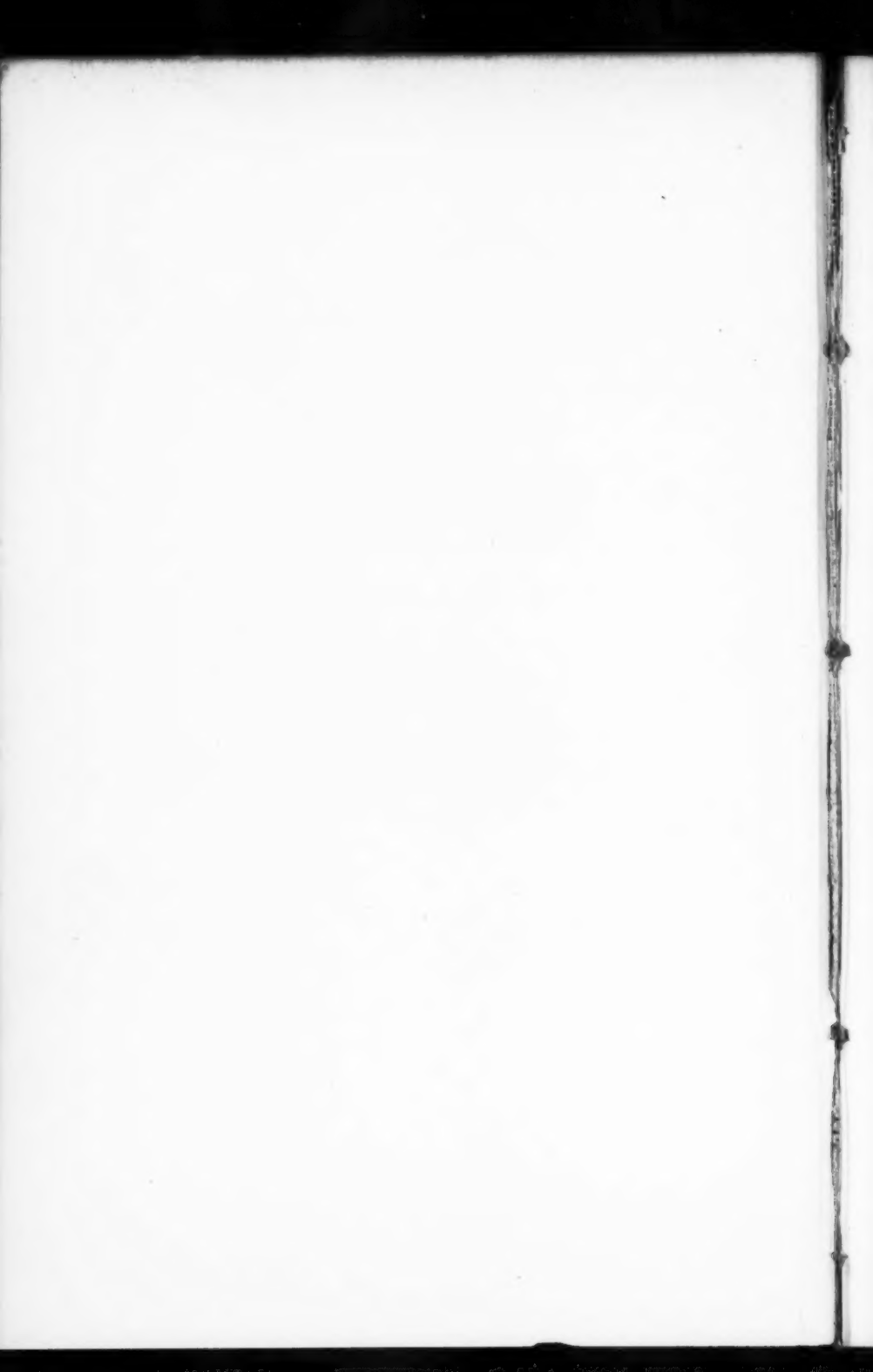


MINNESOTA HISTORY BULLETIN

EDITED BY

SOLON J. BUCK

SUPERINTENDENT OF THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF HISTORY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



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THE RELATION OF THE STATE TO HISTORICAL WORK¹

BY CLARENCE WALWORTH ALVORD

From those far-off ages, when heroic poems were preserved by memory in gilds of bards rather than by written manuscript, there has come down to us the following tale concerning the preservation of the great heroic epic of Ireland, the Cattle Raid of Cooley. Shortly after Senchán Torpeist was elected to the headship of Irish bards, he called an assembly of the poets of Ireland to discover if the whole of that famous poem was held in memory, but found that only scattered parts of it were known. Unwilling that this record of heroic deeds should be lost, Senchán inquired of his students if any would go to the land of Letha to learn the epic. Two followers, one of whom was Senchán's own son, Muirgein, volunteered. Enthusiastically the young men started on their quest and finally came to the kingdom of Connacht and visited the grave of that great hero of mythical Ireland, Fergus mac Roig, who had been one of the principal participants in the cattle raid. Here Muirgein lingered behind while his companion went forward to search for lodging.

The legend relates that Muirgein addressed to the gravestone a song as if he were singing to the hero Fergus himself. It was an incantation. Immediately there arose a great mist which separated Muirgein from his companion for three days and three nights, during which time Fergus, dressed in a magnificent costume of by-gone days, rose from the grave and sang to the eager young poet the epic from beginning to end. Thus by the intervention of supernatural power was the greatest monument of Irish literature preserved for posterity.

¹Read at the annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, January 18, 1915.

This story, which comes to us from the distant past, handed down by word of mouth for generations before it was transcribed for preservation, has its roots in a fundamental principle of human society. The desire to preserve the memory of the deeds of ancestors is common to men of all places and all times, wherever they are gathered in communities. The American Indians in council or war dance solemnly chanted the record of the deeds their ancestors wrought against their life-long enemy in order that their children might be incited to deeds of like daring; the early Greeks found pleasure in the measured cadences of Homer, preserving for them the remembrance of those far-off days when the heroic figures of Agamemnon and Achilles led the forces of their fatherland against Priam's sons.

Coming down through the ages we find that every generation developed its own means of preserving the memory of the past, and that finally this almost unconscious longing for information is metamorphosed into a conscious effort to interpret scientifically the by-gone ages in order that the present day conditions may be better understood. The bard of old becomes the historian, and the man of greater culture turns his pages no less eagerly than the half-barbarous Indian or Greek listened to the ancient songs. The latest stage in this development is reached when a people becomes conscious of its own unity and realizes that its past is the warp and woof of its own consciousness, and by means of official encouragement seeks to preserve those records from which alone the story of its own material and spiritual growth may be woven.

It is natural that this feeling of state personality which leads to the preservation of national records should develop earliest in states with a long history. States such as England, France, Germany, and Italy have regarded the care of their records and their publications as a state duty for many generations, whereas younger states such as our own United States have just begun to consider the question seriously. For the same reason it was natural that our sister states to the east of

the Alleghanies should make a start in this direction long before the states of the West should reach a consciousness of an historic past; but, because of this earlier development of a consciousness in the East, the form of activity has, generally speaking, differed from that of the later development in the West. Before that stage of development in the eastern states was reached when official support to the work of historians would naturally be given, there had grown up strong historical societies, privately endowed, to which the eastern states have left for the most part the performance of this sacred duty. Thus it is to the Massachusetts Historical Society that the old Bay State really leaves the collection of sources and the writing of its history, and a similar situation exists in Pennsylvania and most of the other states; and state support has been only supplementary to such private efforts. In New York, for instance, besides the state historical society, we find that the state itself very early entered the field of history and through the office of state historian performed some excellent work; and such efforts, supplementary in character, have been common in other states. In the southern states, particularly North Carolina, the most important publication of historic documents has been the result of state aid.

In the West there are a few rather wealthy private historical societies, notably those at Chicago and St. Louis and the Ohio Philosophical and Historical Society; but we do not think of these when there is called to our mind the thought of the real creative work in western history, for the most important work in our section has not been accomplished by such privately endowed institutions but through the medium of state supported historical organizations. Two distinct forms of state supported organizations are to be found in the Mississippi Valley. The first is the state supported historical society, the most eminent example of which is the Wisconsin Historical Society. During the early period of its existence, while still under the guidance of Dr. Draper, this remained a private society; but with the appointment of the late Dr. Reuben Gold

Thwaites as secretary it changed its character completely. That genius saw the future possibilities in the state endowed institution, tapped the stream of state appropriations, and made of the society the leader in the whole West. The example of Wisconsin has been followed very generally in the other states of the Mississippi Valley; and although there has not resulted in every case so wise an expenditure of the state's money as in Wisconsin, still there are today many strong institutions in this territory which are putting forth publications that will rival, if not excel, any similar work in the East.

The second form of state supported organization for historical work is that in which the expenditure of the appropriations has been placed in the hands of duly appointed state officials whose responsibility may be easily maintained. In these cases there has been established an historical commission as in Illinois and more recently in Michigan or else there has been appointed an individual known as state archivist or historian to perform this duty. The best instances of this are found in Alabama and Mississippi, whose example has been followed by several other southern states. Although such commissions or archivists may be subject to the vagaries of politics, this form of organization escapes the charge of irresponsibility sometimes made against the state supported historical societies.

That the state should appropriate money for the preservation of the sources of its history and for the encouragement of historical research seems almost like one of those axioms which we call self-evident truths, and that the states of the Mississippi Valley have proved their almost universal acceptance of this duty by the appropriation of money for this purpose is most encouraging. Unfortunately there has not developed among the public a consciousness of the seriousness of this duty nor of the correct method of performing it. We here in America have been slow to learn that training is essential for the performance of public business. The self-confidence of Americans, the doctrine of equality among men, the pre-

dominance of the spoils system in politics have made us distrust the specialist. We are gradually emerging, however, from this provincial viewpoint. Most of us now prefer to call a physician when we are sick, to employ a lawyer when we go to court, and to hire a stenographer when we wish to dictate a letter. Unfortunately the public is not yet awakened to the need of seeking out a well-trained historian when there is demand that history be written. The truth of this statement is proved by the large yearly sale of worthless books of so-called history, by the assigning of history teaching to any member of the high school faculty who has a convenient hour vacant, and by the employment by our states of the untrained to expend the money appropriated for historical activities. Almost inexplicable is that heedlessness that is exhibited by our historical societies and institutions when they make appointments for historical work. The profession of historian requires greater, more careful, and more varied training than that of the lawyer or physician. The methods of the historical science are the result of a long development and comprise a body of learning that can be acquired only after laborious efforts. No one is fitted to write on any field without some knowledge of many other fields. American history cannot be divorced from its European background. Here in Minnesota the history of the state has many connections with Europe. In the period of discovery you touch hands with the French and later with the English; and this later connection lasted long after this territory had become a part of the United States. In your later history many of the principal forces of your civilization must be traced back to the Scandinavian and other states.

Besides the equipment in historical knowledge, the historian must be trained in economics and political science, should be familiar with literature and philosophy and with the most recent trend of thought in the natural sciences. To these should be added a thorough equipment in language, for the modern-day historian finds indispensable a working knowledge of at least two languages, German and French.

It has often been said to me that such a man as I have here depicted is too academic, and for that reason will not reach the ear of the people. The criticism is based upon a wrong interpretation of the duty of the men who are to have charge of the historical work of the state. Theirs is not the duty of writing history for popular consumption. They should not set up as Francis Parkmans. Their duty is no less important, although much more humble. It is the collection of the sources of knowledge and their publication. They are the drudges of the historical fraternity, for they prepare the material which the would-be Francis Parkmans will use; but in order that the future historians may do their work correctly, these drudges must prepare for them the materials in a careful, orderly, and scientific manner. Surely a state cannot afford to do work of this character in such a way that it must all be done over again because unskilled laborers have been employed. Yet that is what is being done in too many states in these United States of ours. Work is being turned out at the expense of the state which adds almost nothing to our knowledge and is of such poor quality that it increases rather than lightens the historian's labor.

The work of those men who are employed by the state to care for its historical activities falls under three headings: first, the collection of data; second, its care; and third, its publication. The collection of the data for the history of the state is one of the first and primary duties that the state owes to its past. We shall find when we come to the discussion of the preservation of the same, that the state has in its archives a very large mass of archival material that needs no collection, and requires only care; but no historical society or institution can remain satisfied with the mere official papers that have emanated from or come into the various departments of government. These form no doubt the bones of the skeletons of history and their careful preservation is essential, but if history is to be written as it should be, there is needed far greater knowledge of the life of the people than can be found in gov-

ernors' messages, letters of the secretary of state, treasury accounts, or census returns.

The story of a state's past is so varied that material of all kinds which illustrates the various activities of its citizens must be collected. Much of the materials which historians use may seem to the layman to be of little value, but they are the sources from which are depicted the life of the people. The late Dr. Reuben Gold Thwaites of the Wisconsin Historical Society used to delight to quote in the missionary history sermons which he preached up and down the Mississippi Valley—sermons which led many an historical society to give greater heed to its collection of sources—the following sentence: "The literary rubbish of one generation is the priceless treasure of the next." And he used to tell as illustrative of this remark a story drawn from his own wide experience. One day there came to him a former school superintendent who informed him that he had found lying away forgotten in a box in his attic a large collection of the text-books that were formerly used in the state of Wisconsin. They dated from the very earliest time of the school system in the state down close to the present era. The owner informed Dr. Thwaites that he was intending to destroy them when he thought that the Wisconsin Historical Society might find them of some use. Naturally Dr. Thwaites, who had preached the doctrine of saving so long and so loud, said "Yes." Here were old arithmetics, spelling books, and grammars, the rubbish of the school-rooms—such things as our school children buy and cast aside without a thought. Who could find any use for such things?

Scarcely had Thwaites arranged the collection upon the shelves of the historical society, when a student from the department of education of the University of Wisconsin came to him to ask if the Wisconsin Historical Society had any material to assist in writing a doctor's thesis on the development of public education in the state of Wisconsin. "Did it have? Of course it had material on all phases of the state's history," said Dr. Thwaites and he proudly led this seeker after

knowledge to those shelves that had so recently been filled with what proved to be the best collection of school text-books in the state.

There are many similar stories that might be told coming to us from all parts of the world, stories of how collections of letters, invitations, menus, programs, street ballads, and such ephemeral literature have been saved and proved a store house for later historians. The advertisements of the older newspapers of this country—that part of the newspaper which we today so carelessly cast aside—furnish our historians most reliable information on the life of our ancestors.

From another viewpoint the necessity of collecting all the material bearing upon a subject may be illustrated. Our historians have frequently trusted too readily to the printed material that was so easily accessible, thinking that from this they could draw their story. They have forgotten that the sources of information which are printed are but a very small portion of the material which the historian must use in order to tell a complete story. An interesting tale of error that was due to the failure to find all the material has come under my observation. Some thirty-five years ago Mr. E. G. Mason of the Chicago Historical Society went into southern Illinois seeking for the old Kaskaskia manuscripts. As you know, Kaskaskia was one of those early French villages of Illinois founded at the beginning of the eighteenth century and the chief settlement in these far western lands for over a hundred years. So far as we know there had been no persistent effort made to find these records before the secretary of the Chicago Historical Society made his famous journey.

He reported incorrectly that all the documents were lost, but he did return with one record book which had been kept by John Todd, county lieutenant of the county of Illinois which was created by an act of the Virginia legislature after George Rogers Clark occupied the country during the Revolutionary War. In this record book Mr. Mason discovered copies of two documents issued by John Todd in the year 1779: an order

for a guard to accompany a condemned slave named Moreau to Cahokia and a warrant for the execution of another slave named Manuel. The latter was to be burned at the stake on the bank of the Mississippi River near Kaskaskia. Mr. Mason suggested that the two negroes were put to death for the practice of voodooism or witchcraft, since he connected these documents with a story of a witchcraft fear that had been handed down by another historian, who was almost contemporary with these events. Mr. Mason also drew the attention of his readers to the fact that the death warrant issued against Manuel had been crossed out in the record book and suggested that John Todd, county lieutenant of the county of Illinois, was ashamed of the act that he had done.¹

Thus far we have Mr. Mason's story, but that is not the end of this tradition. A man whose name may possibly be known in other connections to some of you, Theodore Roosevelt, at an early period in his career wrote a history which he called *The Winning of the West*, in which he repeated the story of the death of Manuel. Mr. Roosevelt's account is as follows:²

"Yet there are two entries in the proceedings of the creole courts for the summer of 1779, as preserved in Todd's 'Record Book,' which are of startling significance. To understand them it must be remembered that the creoles were very ignorant and superstitious, and that they one and all, including, apparently, even their priests, firmly believed in witchcraft and sorcery. Some of their negro slaves had been born in Africa, the others had come from the Lower Mississippi or the West Indies; they practised the strange rites of voodooism, and a few were adepts in the art of poisoning. Accordingly the French were

¹Edward G. Mason, "Col. John Todd's Record-Book" in *Fergus Historical Series*, 12: 49-68, reprinted in his *Chapters from Illinois History*, 250-279. The record book itself is printed in *Early Chicago and Illinois*, 289-316 (*Chicago Historical Collections*, 5). See also John Reynolds, *Pioneer History of Illinois* (1852 ed.), 143.

²Roosevelt, *Winning of the West*, 2: 174.

always on the look-out lest their slaves should, by spell or poison, take their lives. It must also be kept in mind that the pardoning power of the commandant did not extend to cases of treason or murder—a witchcraft trial being generally one for murder,—and that he was expressly forbidden to interfere with the customs and laws, or go counter to the prejudices, of the inhabitants.

“At this time the creoles were smitten by a sudden epidemic of fear that their negro slaves were trying to bewitch and poison them. Several of the negroes were seized and tried, and in June two were condemned to death. One, named Moreau, was sentenced to be hung outside Cahokia. The other, a Kaskaskian slave named Manuel, suffered a worse fate. He was sentenced ‘to be chained to a post at the water-side, and there to be burnt alive and his ashes scattered.’ These two sentences, and the directions for their immediate execution, reveal a dark chapter in the early history of Illinois. It seems a strange thing that, in the United States, three years after the declaration of independence, men should have been burnt and hung for witchcraft, in accordance with the laws, and with the decision of the proper court. The fact that the victim, before being burned, was forced to make ‘honorable fine’ at the door of the Catholic church, shows that the priest at least acquiesced in the decision. The blame justly resting on the Puritans of seventeenth-century New England must likewise fall on the Catholic French of eighteenth-century Illinois.”

Unfortunately for Mr. Roosevelt’s description of the burning of a witch in Catholic Illinois, the minutes of the courts that tried the said negroes have been discovered, and from these we find that the two negroes were tried for poisoning their master and mistress. Their guilt was proved; the sentence of the Kaskaskia court was that Manuel should be burned at the stake, a sentence that was in strict accordance with the ruling law of Virginia which demanded such a penalty in the case of the murder of a master by his slave. Contrary to Mr.

Roosevelt's statement, the custom of Catholic Illinois was not even taken into consideration.¹

We now come to the crossing out in the record book of the warrant which, as you probably remember, Mr. Mason explained as due to the conscience of John Todd, county lieutenant. The explanation of this peculiar act was simple when there was found another warrant issued later, by the terms of which the sentence against Manuel was changed from burning at the stake to death by hanging. Of course Todd crossed out the warrant which was no longer to be executed. With the full evidence before us what shall we say of Mr. Roosevelt's judgment concerning "the blame" that "must likewise fall on the Catholic French of eighteenth-century Illinois"?

The story illustrates an error in historical criticism that has frequently been committed. It is so easy to draw conclusions from too meager information. That this error may be avoided, it is the duty of the state to make it possible for historians to know all that may be known. For that purpose the state should send emissaries up and down its territory to enter every attic in every town and village in the state, if necessary, in search for that historically illuminating material, which may become at any moment material for another kind of illumination whenever the tidy housekeeper determines that house-cleaning time has come.

It is very remarkable how intelligent people fail to realize the value of manuscripts that might be expected to appeal to them as of some importance. An illustration that comes from my own family, which on the whole has been made up of rather intelligent men and women, will show how lightly the housewife throws important historical documents into the fire. My father was a western Massachusetts man and was active in the anti-slavery agitation of the ante-bellum days, and his activity brought him into correspondence with some of the important

¹ Alvord, *Cahokia Records*, 12-21 (*Illinois Historical Collections*, 2); John G. Shea, *Life and Times of the Most Rev. John Carroll*, 190 (*History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, 2).

leaders of that movement. He was also a diary-keeping man, entering on the page each day an account of his experiences or of his thoughts. This practice he kept up for years. When he died my mother had all his letters destroyed except a few examples of the penmanship of such men as Garrison, Sumner, and others of similar fame. The diaries passed into the possession of my half-brother and were preserved by him until his death. In the course of time both diaries and letters were inherited by an older brother of mine who stored them in his attic. One day my sister-in-law, who is of the New England type of housekeeper, determined to clean out that particular corner and into the fire went every letter and diary except those two diaries which happen to contain the record of the birth of her husband and your humble servant. So of my father's diaries which he kept through a generation, there are but two left, and of his correspondence practically nothing. You may say that this material was not of very great importance to the history of the United States; but in speaking of collections of historical material we are not considering only the writing of the history of the nation or even the writing of the history of the state, for the state, if it does its duty, must strive to preserve the papers and records which will serve in writing the family histories of its citizens. The loss of those diaries was, for the history of the Alvord family, irreparable.

The destruction of such family records, which is taking place all over this land, may actually result in a most serious, although unconscious, loss. From some of these families—and it may be yours or mine—there may be born in a generation or two a great world figure like William Shakespeare or Napoleon Bonaparte, about whom posterity will wish to know everything. Such a man can never be understood except through a study of his ancestry, and every scrap of paper concerning him, his father and mother, and all his ancestors will assume a priceless value as an historical document. Those of you who have followed the studies upon the life of Dante will remember how the biographers of that great poet have searched

every available nook for information concerning his ancestry and have succeeded in reaching back only to the third generation. What wouldn't they give for family records that would make possible the true explanation of his genius?

Besides the numerous collections of family, business, and semi-official papers scattered through the cities, towns, and villages, there is a very large mass of source material for the history of any state which must be sought outside of its confines both in other states of the Union and in Europe. For instance, there must be very many letters and public documents illustrating the history of Minnesota in the Scandinavian states. Means should be taken to secure copies of these as rapidly as possible. Provided a regular sum of money is set aside each year for this purpose and care is exercised in the selection of documents to be copied or reproduced by the photostat, any historical society will find itself very shortly becoming an attractive center for students who quickly discover those depositories that furnish the best facilities for research. For a number of years now the University of Illinois has pursued this policy with most gratifying results.

While upon this subject of the collection of historical documents allow me to interpose a word of warning. We of the West must cease to cling to the prevalent idea that those events alone are history that have passed from the memory of man. Too great attention in our historical societies and in our historical institutions has been paid to that far away past over which the passage of time has shed a glamour. The time of the gay French voyageur, the British red-coat, and the fur-trader is very romantic, but the real history of the West does not belong to these days of long ago. Much more important for us are the days when the actual settlers carrying their farm utensils on flatboats or in their covered wagons were seeking the fertile lands of the West to make homes for themselves and their followers. History is not confined even to those days of the pioneer, for many an historical problem of utmost importance may be found in the civilization that is almost contemporary.

Here in Minnesota is the problem of the melting-pot. Your population has been drawn from many states in Europe. Men with foreign language and foreign customs have settled here in your midst and are gradually becoming assimilated with the American people. One of the most interesting problems that can be conceived concerns itself with this process of assimilation. How is the descendant of the Vikings being turned into an American?

The second of the duties to be discharged by the state is the preservation of the sources of its history. These sources are generally divided by historians and archivists into two classes: first, historical manuscripts; and second, public archives. This division has, on the whole, a certain justification. The historical manuscripts are such papers and documents as have come from private sources, the importance of which has been already described in sufficient detail. The public archives comprise those manuscripts that have been brought into being by the business of the state and are preserved, in the first place, for purposes of administration. Naturally there are numbered among these not only the archives belonging to the offices of the state capitol but also all those papers that contain a record of the business of county, township, etc.—in other words, both the records of the central and those of the local governments.

The United States and the various states of the Union have lagged far behind European states in the preservation of their public archives. In Europe there has been developed the science of archive economy and men are regularly instructed in the various universities to perform this very important duty to the state. In most of the countries the archivist is required to have received the degree of doctor of philosophy or doctor of laws and to have pursued certain definite courses in history, law, and archive economy that will best fit him for performing his duties. In almost all the states of Europe the archives are kept in buildings used for no other purpose. Sometimes, it is true, the building is old and very crowded, but the custodians

and all those who are entrusted with its care are trained men who carefully watch over the interests of the state. In many of the countries new buildings have been erected particularly for the purpose of housing the archives, and in others plans for such buildings were already made before the outbreak of the present war. In each one of these archives buildings a special room is set aside for those who wish to use the archives and adequate catalogues or inventories of the documents have been prepared.

What has the United States done for the preservation of our valuable national archives? The answer must be "Nothing." If we were to test the degree of civilization that has been reached by the citizens of the United States according to a principle that was laid down by a writer on the archives of Russia, namely, "the care which a nation devotes to the preservation of the manuscripts of its past may serve as a true measure of the degree of civilization to which it has attained," the United States would have to be assigned a position not far above the tribes of darkest Africa. It is true that no government has expended larger sums of money for the purchase of historical papers than the United States or for the publication of the same; but "no government," as Mr. Waldo Leland has said in a very interesting paper on our national archives,¹ "has more signally failed in the fundamental and far more important duty of preserving and rendering accessible to the student the first and foremost sources of the nation's history, the national archives."

The great accumulation of documents in Washington has completely outgrown the storage room that has been set aside for them with the result that the government is paying thousands of dollars for the renting of buildings that are little more than fire traps, for the preservation of what some of the officials regard as useless paper, but which must be considered by an intelligent public as documents of the utmost value. These

¹*American Historical Review*, 18:1.

documents, stored in cellars and sub-cellars, under terraces and in attics, piled heap upon heap, subject to the danger of fire and to the corroding influence of dampness, are rapidly disintegrating under conditions that no civilized government should allow to exist.

The conditions in the states are not dissimilar to those that are to be found in Washington. In very few of the states do we have anything like an archives building. In almost all cases the public archives are deposited in the capitol building under conditions very similar to those that have been described in Washington. These buildings are by no means fireproof, and every now and then such disastrous fires as that which destroyed the capitol in Jefferson City, Missouri, only a short time ago, bring to our attention the dangers that are besetting these priceless treasures. It seemed as though conditions were not so bad in the capitol building in Albany, New York, where a presumably fireproof structure had been erected; but overcrowding, the impossibility of making conditions right in a building that was not primarily planned as an archival depository, and the fact that politics placed in the positions of janitors and fire-wardens men who were particularly unfit to perform their duties, made possible that disastrous fire on March 29, 1911, which shocked the whole United States. There were destroyed countless treasures which the world can never recover. The loss to the history of the West is inestimable. Throughout the period of British domination in the West, from the close of the French and Indian War to the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, the most important figure in western history was the superintendent of Indians in the northern district, Sir William Johnston of the colony of New York. He wrote to his agents constantly concerning the Indian troubles of the Old Northwest. He was receiving reports from his deputies and his commissaries. Traders interested in the fur-trade and land speculators were continually asking for his assistance. Sir William Johnston was a methodical man and kept all his correspondence, even copies of the letters that he sent. The

twenty-six folio volumes of this collection formed one of the treasures of the Albany capitol. Some of the most important of these volumes were completely destroyed, many of them were so burned as to make their contents illegible, and a few only escaped entirely safe. It is but one of the many losses that were suffered in that terrible disaster.

How long it will take the United States Congress to realize the need of a public archives building, it is impossible to prophesy; but the prospect in the various states is more hopeful at the present time than has been the case in the past. In several of our states there have been built proper buildings for the preservation of the material of the historical societies and in some few for the preservation of public archives. In a few states, such as Alabama, Mississippi, and Iowa, archivists or commissioners have been appointed to supervise the public archives of the state. In my own state at the present time plans are under way for the erection of a building to house various institutions, among them the historical library and the public archives; but such isolated cases do not make an ideal situation. The time must come when there shall be a public official in every state in the Union known as an archivist who shall have had special training for the performance of his duty and who shall be the custodian of all the archives except those in current use. The documents will be preserved in a building carefully designed for that purpose; they will be mended when needed, labeled and catalogued so that any individual, whether he is an historian, public official, or individual interested in a private lawsuit or in public affairs, may go and with the least loss of time find that which he is seeking. Our northern neighbor, the Dominion of Canada, is far ahead of us in this respect. There such a special archives building has been constructed and the archivist holds the important title of deputy minister.

So far we have been considering the danger to archives that may come from lack of proper protection against fire, moisture, heat, etc., but great losses have resulted from the carelessness and ignorance of officials. Autograph collectors

have stolen almost every signature of Abraham Lincoln from the documents in the various depositories of the state of Illinois. The national archives at Washington have suffered terribly from similar vandalism. Borrowers, who promise faithfully to return the documents, and thieves have been the cause of great loss. But on the whole wanton destruction at the hands of ignorant officials has resulted in the worst disasters.

A friend recently told me a story of the temporary loss and final preservation of the Santa Fe Manuscripts. For years these manuscripts, about twenty thousand dating from the seventeenth and following centuries, had been stored in the adobe house which was both the dwelling house of the governor and the executive offices. There was no system of filing in use in far-off New Mexico and the manuscripts were piled on the floor of a room. One of the American governors, who was sent there after New Mexico was made a territory, desired more room and ordered a clerk or some other employee to destroy the "manuscript rubbish." Fortunately the clerk was a thrifty soul and preferred to sell the paper to the merchants of the town as they might need it. He found it easy to dispose of, and the Santa Fe Manuscripts were sent around to the householders as wrapping for their groceries, nails, and other household purchases. Finally one purchaser noticed that the wrapping of one of his bundles was an old deed to a valuable strip of land, and he started an investigation which resulted in a public agitation. The papers were returned and finally sent to Washington where they are now to be found.

The necessity of housing the public archives of the capitol seems to be a subject that has already become a matter of serious public discussion. Only three or four states, however, have taken thought so far of the archives that are to be found in our counties and towns. Some of these records are of the utmost importance for an understanding of the history of the state. If one is to study the population intensively he must go to the archives of the county clerk, where are kept marriage records, birth records, and census records. We are no longer

in the habit of thinking that history includes only the acts and succession of governors, nor do we weave our story around the activities of congressmen and senators; but we write today the history of the people. We must understand how the men and women of the past have entered our territory, how they have lived, how they gradually formed themselves into self-governing communities, how civilization has advanced by leaps and bounds until the magnificent states of the present day have been developed. This story is one of the most magnificent that has ever been chronicled. Greater than the deeds of Rome are the deeds of those pioneer ancestors of ours who won a continent. Much of the necessary sources for such a history may be found in the little offices of the county and circuit clerks, but only a few states in the Union are paying close and careful attention to the preservation of these records or have made any effort to find out under what conditions they are kept.

In Massachusetts and one or two other eastern states surveys have been made, and officers have been appointed who have control of the local archives and see to it that the clerks make their entries correctly and are using paper that will last and ink that will not fade. Outside of these few eastern states no attempt similar to this has been made. My own state, Illinois, has been a leader in another development. During the last few years there has been made by the State Historical Library a complete survey of the local archives, and there is now in the press a report based upon the results of the survey. On the whole the conditions that have been found in Illinois are not very satisfactory. Many of the archives are housed in buildings that are far from fireproof and there have been within the last few years many disastrous fires that have swept out of existence all the local records.

One or two stories concerning conditions that have been found will be of interest to you in order to show what the attitude of the average public official is toward his records. In Belleville, Illinois, there had come down from the eighteenth century large masses of documents that told the story of the

French settlement at Cahokia. About twenty years ago it was decided to remodel the courthouse, and the circuit clerk decided that he would have a house cleaning. He came upon bundles of these old French records and ordered his janitor to take them out in the alley behind the courthouse and burn them. This was actually done with the result that from Cahokia, which was almost as important as Kaskaskia in the early history of Illinois, there have been preserved only a few documents. This happened in enlightened Illinois twenty years ago.

Another story of similar character comes from one of the men who made the survey of the Illinois county records. He was ushered by a young man of sixteen years to an attic in a certain county courthouse in order that he might see what was there. A few bookcases had been set up and the books were stored away in a careful manner, but his youthful guide proudly informed him that this orderliness was only of very recent date. A few months before this the floor of the attic had been covered knee-deep with old papers and books, and this young man of sixteen had been ordered by his superior to pick out the stuff that was valuable and destroy the rest—and this he had done. A boy without a high school education was chosen to pass judgment on the value of these documents. One can only say that this system was better than the wholesale destruction at Belleville.

The third function which the state should perform for the preservation of its history is that of the publication of the sources of information; and I mean by that contemporary documents. The first principle which I wish to lay down on this subject is that publication should be the result of careful planning.

In too many historical societies throughout the United States and Europe the method of selection of matter to be printed appears to have been haphazard. In my mind's eye I can picture a meeting of the executive committee in a typical historical society of America. Around a mahogany table there are seated several men whose real business in life is far removed

from the haunts of scholars, but who have been elected or appointed to office for social, financial, or political reasons. The president informs the company that there is a thousand dollars in the treasury and really they should print something. What should it be? A member answers this call of duty with the remark: "Well, there is Jones. He has a manuscript all ready. Why not publish that?" Without thought whether Jones's paper is particularly good or particularly valuable or whether it has any connection with their previous publications, they rush to the press, having performed their duty to the society by satisfying the mania for getting into print. Such a procedure—and the picture is not a caricature—must be severely condemned. Plans for the publication of series of volumes through successive years should be carefully worked out. There is no reason why there cannot be formulated today plans under which historical institutions will be publishing a hundred years from now. That is what the historians of Germany, England, Italy, and other states of Europe are doing. Such a plan is now in operation in Illinois, and I hope that in no far distant time such a plan will be in operation here in Minnesota. The men in charge of the work in Illinois have divided the history of the state into various periods or phases, devoting to each a series of volumes. Thus a series may be completed at any time in the future. The volumes are printed when they are ready. We have in process of making at the present time volumes belonging to six different series stretching over a period of almost two hundred years. There is no thought of including in such volumes literary productions. That is far from our purpose. We propose only to make public the sources of the history of Illinois.

For the production of such volumes skillful assistants are needed. You cannot depend upon one man to do all the work. He must be aided by skilled editors, by copyists, by index makers, and proofreaders—people who are in sympathy with the high ideals of scientific scholarship. Each volume should be an example of the best scientific editing.

One more topic and I shall have finished. Is it the duty of the state to provide for research in these sources in order to find out what their meaning is? In other words, is it the duty of the state to promote the production of historical monographs or histories of the state? If this be done, each state in our Union has an organ wherein such studies may best be promoted—I mean the state universities. In the department of history we have men who are devoting themselves to such research. We have gathered there graduate students who are hoping in the course of time to become trained historians. If the production of historical studies is a duty of the state—and I think it is—no better place for the conduct of it can be found than in the seminaries of these universities. Let such students have the freest use of the manuscripts in the historical societies or institutions. The employees of these should give them all the required help and advice, and every encouragement should be given to secure their success. In this way, without extra expense to the state, there can be secured that scholarly research which is the finest flower of our public educational system.

At the beginning of this address the story of the preservation of the great Irish epic was told. By means of incantation a miracle was wrought, a man arose from the dead and repeated the lost poem for the edification of the living. The days of miracles have long passed away and those of gross materialism are upon us. No magic powers of an Irish bard will bring back to us the countless records of the pioneer days that have been lost to us through the carelessness and ignorance of custodians. To preserve what remains we must have recourse to those means that have been summed up in that phrase heralded throughout our land, "Safety first." That must become the motto of every state. "Safety first" means archives building for the capital and fireproof buildings for the county records.

But I have failed in my duty if this is the only thought I leave with you tonight. It is a difficult task to teach a democratic state like ours the necessity of a scientific oversight of its historical records, of the need of specially trained officials

to collect, preserve, and publish the sources of history; but we of the West are learning that lesson. We are, I believe, going to prove the falsity of those charges so often made against democracies, that they never care for the higher needs of society, that they neglect the intellectual side of the state's duties. Here and there we find signs that there is budding a real sense of the state's duty to its history. In some of the states of the Union state-supported historical work of a high character is being done, and the example of these few is acting as a leaven upon the rest. The future is indeed bright, and I look forward to the time when every state in the West will be performing its duty to its past in a better manner than is done by any state today. Democracy may carry with it a tendency to level down, but in an educated democracy like ours the level must be high and always rising higher, and this makes possible the wide diffusion of an appreciation of all that is best. Among those best things which the state should do is the fulfilment of this duty to its past that its future children may be able to understand the lives of their forebears, from whose activities alone can they learn the true interpretation of those vital forces that make up their own social psychic life.

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY NOTES

MEETINGS

The executive council, at a meeting on November 10, 1914, appointed Warren Upham, who has served the society faithfully as secretary since 1895, to the position of archeologist to succeed the late Professor N. H. Winchell. At the same meeting, Solon J. Buck, assistant professor of history in the University of Minnesota, was appointed to the position of superintendent of the society.

The annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society was held in the Capitol at St. Paul, January 18, 1915. The business session convened at 7:30 P.M. in the reading room of the society's library. The superintendent presented a report on the operations of the society during the year 1914. As the information in this report will be included in the *Eighteenth Biennial Report* of the society, soon to be issued, it is not necessary to recapitulate it here.

The society, by a unanimous vote, adopted the following resolution:

Resolved, That a committee of three be appointed by the president to revise and consolidate the by-laws of the society and of the executive council; and said by-laws, when adopted by said council, to forthwith become effective and so remain until otherwise ordered by the society.

The triennial election of members of the council resulted in the reelection of all the former members. The society then adjourned to the Senate Chamber, where Professor Clarence W. Alvord, of the University of Illinois and the Illinois State Historical Library, delivered the annual address on "The Relation of the State to Historical Work." This part of the meeting was open to the public and an audience of about eighty comfortably filled the Senate Chamber.

At the meeting of the executive council on February 8, officers for the triennium 1915-1918 were elected as follows: Charles P. Noyes, president; Gideon S. Ives, first vice-president; Frederic A. Fogg, second vice-president; Solon J. Buck, secretary; and Everett H. Bailey, treasurer.

The committee on revision of the by-laws, Messrs. Sanborn, Ingersoll, and Buck, appointed by President Lightner in accordance with the resolution adopted by the society at the annual meeting, reported a draft of a new set of by-laws. This was read and, in accordance with the provision for amendment in the old by-laws, was laid over for one month. The new by-laws, if adopted at the March meeting of the council, will be printed in the *Biennial Report*.

A paper on "The Minnesota State Archives, their Character, Condition, and Historical Value" by Herbert A. Kellar, instructor in history in the University of Minnesota, will be read at the meeting of the council on April 12. This will be an open meeting and all members of the society and others interested are invited to attend in the reading room of the society's library at 8:30 P.M.

PUBLICATION PLANS

The MINNESOTA HISTORY BULLETIN has been established primarily for the purpose of keeping the members, and others who may be interested, in touch with the work of the Minnesota Historical Society. It is believed that the timely publication of papers read at the meetings or contributed will have considerable advantages over the method of accumulating such material for a series of years and then publishing it in a bulky volume of *Collections*. Besides such papers the BULLETIN will contain reviews of books pertinent to Minnesota history, notes on the activities of the society, perhaps occasional documents or reprints, and miscellaneous matter of various sorts. No attempt will be made to have a uniform number of pages in each issue; thus the temptation to publish articles of slight value in order to fill up space will be avoided. The issues and pages

will be numbered consecutively and when about five hundred pages have been printed, a title page and an index will be issued for the first volume and the second begun.

The publication of the miscellaneous material in the *BULLETIN* will make possible the reservation of the *Collections* for more unified and extensive works, the greater part of which will be documentary in character. Plans are being developed for various series in the *Collections*, each of which will have to do with a period or phase of Minnesota history and will contain all the documentary material available on the subject, and not elsewhere readily accessible in print and well edited. Work has been started on a series which will contain the messages and proclamations of the governors of Minnesota and on a bibliographical series. One volume of the latter will probably consist of a list, with descriptions and references to files, of Minnesota newspapers and periodicals, and another will be a bibliography of the works of Minnesota authors.

Volume 15 of the *Collections*, which has been edited by Mr. Upham, will be distributed in a few weeks. It contains papers read at meetings of the society and the executive council, and obituaries of deceased members from 1908 to 1914 inclusive. Mr. Upham has plans for extensive archeological work which, it is hoped, will result in time in the completion of volume 16, the first part of which, the work of Professor N. H. Winchell, was published in 1913.

Professor William W. Folwell, first president of the University of Minnesota and the author of *Minnesota, the North Star State* in the *American Commonwealths* series, has practically completed the manuscript of a new history of Minnesota. This history, which will probably consist of three volumes, will be published by the society.

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BUILDING

For many years the work of the society has been hampered by the inadequacy of its quarters in the basement of the Capi-

tol. Thousands of books and numberless pictures and museum articles have had to be stored in boxes in the sub-basement or left in the Old Capitol where they are in constant danger of destruction by fire, while members of the staff have had to work in all sorts of cubby-holes and dark corners. Finally, after much earnest effort on the part of members of the society and of others who believe in the preservation of the materials for the history of the state, the legislature of 1913 appropriated five hundred thousand dollars for the construction of a building for the society and the Supreme Court.

In accordance with the terms of this bill a site was purchased and paid for with money from the private funds of the society, turned over to the state for that purpose. An architect was selected who, with members of the Supreme Court and the secretary of the society, visited buildings of a similar character in the neighboring states for the purpose of ascertaining what was necessary in the construction of the proposed building. After this and other investigations, it was found, from estimates made by the architect, that a building suitable and adequate for both the society and the Supreme Court could not be constructed within the limits of the appropriation. The Supreme Court, in view of this situation and also of the protest of the State Bar Association against its removal from the Capitol, finally reached the conclusion that it preferred to remain in its present quarters, particularly if, by the removal of the historical society from the Capitol, it could secure added space there.

As a result of this situation it was decided to apply to the legislature for an amendment to the act of 1913, eliminating the Supreme Court, providing for the care and preservation of the state archives in the proposed building, and also providing that any part of the building not in use or actually needed for the purposes of the society, might be used for other state purposes under the direction of the governor. A bill to this effect has been introduced in both houses of the legislature. Another bill, however, providing for the repeal *in toto* of the

act of 1913 has been introduced into the House, and both of these measures will come up for consideration by that body in the near future.

STATE AND LOCAL ARCHIVES

The American people are slowly awakening to the necessity of giving some attention to the care and preservation of the national, state, and local archives. As a result of the work of the Public Archives Commission established by the American Historical Association some fifteen years ago, the archives of about thirty of the American states have been examined and reported upon by competent men. These reports, containing more or less complete inventories of the material found, have been published in the *Annual Reports* of the American Historical Association.

The commission has made several attempts to secure such a report for Minnesota, but nothing was done until a few months ago when the Minnesota Historical Society agreed to coöperate with the commission in forwarding the work. The assistance of Mr. Herbert A. Kellar, instructor in history in the University of Minnesota, was secured and considerable progress has already been made. Most of the offices, vaults, and storerooms in the New Capitol and some in the Old Capitol have been examined and preliminary lists of the material found have been made.

As this work progresses, it becomes more and more evident that the present system of caring for the files of state records not in current use is inefficient, unscientific, and wasteful of space and of the time of public officials and employees. In the early days when the population of the state was small and its activities few, the quantity of records or archives was not great and it made little difference how they were cared for. Today, however, with the increased population and functions of the state, the care of these records has become a problem, the seriousness of which is not always fully realized.

For a variety of reasons the existing non-current records

and many current ones are in considerable confusion. Many documents or files of value not only for history but also for record purposes appear to be missing or incomplete, and the finding of specific documents often involves days of search. This situation is not so much the fault of the officials in charge as of the system. No one has been especially interested in the older records and frequent changes in personnel have resulted in ignorance of previous arrangements and in changes in methods of filing. Records little used have been packed away in vaults or storerooms, often unprotected from dirt and damp, and if they were arranged at first in some semblance of order, that condition has not lasted long. Fortunately the records in the New Capitol are not in danger of destruction by fire, unless, as has happened in other states, some of them should be consigned to the flames by officials ignorant of their value. Many documents, however, are rapidly disintegrating as a result of exposure to dirt and damp, while the archives which have been left in the Old Capitol are constantly in danger of destruction by a conflagration.

The remedy for this condition is to be sought in the experience of European countries and the older states of the Union. Practically all the states of Europe maintain archives bureaus where non-current records are classified and cared for by experts, and some American states—notably our neighbor, Iowa—have done the same with excellent results. Just as the state has an auditor who keeps the accounts for all departments, and a treasurer to handle the funds for all departments, so it should make provision for some agency whose business it would be to look after the records of all departments.

As the non-current records are likely to be consulted most by investigators into the history of the state, although it not infrequently happens that they have a more immediately practical use, it is quite fitting that the Minnesota Historical Society, an institution which has been collecting and caring for materials relating to the history of Minnesota ever since the organization of the territory, should be established as a State Depart-

ment of Archives and History and put in charge of this work. The society would, if given the requisite authority and funds, establish a separate archives department under the direction of a competent archivist and in the course of time the old records of the state would be cleaned, arranged, filed, and made accessible not only to historical students but to the public officials themselves.

The officers of the society, believing that a beginning should be made at once in this important work, have drawn up the following bill (House File no. 564) which was introduced by Hon. Charles A. Gilman, and is now in the hands of the House committee on state and other libraries.

A bill for an Act to Establish the Minnesota Historical Society as a State Department of Archives and History and to Provide for the Collection and Administration of Archives, Public Records, and Historical Material.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Minnesota:

Section 1. The Minnesota Historical Society is hereby established as a Department of Archives and History of the State of Minnesota, and is authorized to hold property in trust for the state.

Section 2. The said society is authorized to receive and is hereby made the custodian of such records, files, documents, books, and papers as may be turned over to it from any of the public offices of the state, including state, county, city, village, and township offices. It shall provide for their preservation, classification, arranging, and indexing, so that they may be made available for the use of the public. Copies of all such papers, documents, files, and records, when made out and certified to by the superintendent of said society, shall be admitted as evidence in all courts, with the same effect as if certified to by the original custodian thereof.

Section 3. All public officials are hereby authorized to turn over to the said society such records, files, documents, books, and papers in their custody as are not in current use.

Section 4. The said society shall, so far as practicable, cause an inspection to be made of the current records of the public offices in the state, including state, county, city, village, and township

offices; shall investigate the practices in other states with reference to the making and preservation of records and the inspection thereof; and shall include in its next biennial report recommendations for such legislation as it may deem necessary to secure the proper making and preservation of state and local records.

Section 5. The said society shall make a biennial report in January of each odd year to the governor of the state, which report shall treat of the historical and archival interests of the state and set forth the character and extent of the work of the society during the preceding biennium.

Section 6. All acts and parts of acts inconsistent with this act are hereby repealed.

Section 7. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage.

It will be noted that the bill relates not only to state but also to local archives. The situation in many of the courthouses of the state is probably as bad as, if not worse than, that in the Capitol. In the state of Illinois an extensive investigation carried on during the last three years by the Illinois State Historical Library showed clearly the need of action on the part of the state along the line of supervision of the making and preservation of county records. It is doubtful if the situation is much better in Minnesota, and certainly it should be looked into, for these local records are of vital importance to the people of the state.

Another point to be noted is that there is nothing mandatory about the proposed measure; officials are not required to turn over anything which they deem it desirable to retain in their offices, but they are authorized to transfer to the society, as the archives department of the state, the non-current records which, in most cases, are only a burden to them. Nor is the society required to take over at once whatever may be offered. Obviously the transfer should be made only so rapidly as the material received can be classified and arranged. In Iowa some officials were unwilling to turn over material at first, but they soon discovered the convenience of having the records cared

for by experts and now the archivist has difficulty in restraining them from transferring the material more rapidly than he can care for it.

Attention should be given also to the making of current records, for the present and future must be considered as well as the past. Much time and space could doubtless be saved and more valuable results achieved by improved methods and systems of making both state and local records. Still more important is the matter of the permanence of the materials used. Because of the inferior quality of paper, ink, or typewriter ribbons, many public records of importance are rapidly becoming illegible and much money has been spent in making copies. The proposed law would pave the way for an investigation of this whole subject and perhaps result in saving to the people of the state not only considerable sums of money but also important records, which no amount of money can replace once they are gone.

Business men and corporations provide carefully for the making, classification, and care of their records, in order that they may be readily accessible and that their preservation may be insured. Intelligent men everywhere carefully preserve files of their correspondence and other documents not only for practical purposes but for their personal, biographical, or historical value. The state and its subdivisions spend large sums of money in making records and it would seem to be but a policy of enlightened self-interest to give careful consideration to their preservation and accessibility.

